

Opportunity for All?

Exploring the Social Barriers to Post-Secondary Education in Nova Scotia



Abstract

StudentsNS prioritizes the *accessibility* of post-secondary education (PSE) as one of its four foundational values because we believe that education is critical to the growth and development of individual Nova Scotians, their families, their communities, and the Province as a whole. This position paper will identify and describe the major barriers that exist in Nova Scotia and attempt to understand their impact on the post-secondary participation of historically marginalized populations. Existing public policy and programs aimed at preparing Nova Scotians for post-secondary education (primarily the K-12 public school system) are critically examined as well as other policies, programs, and community initiatives that make up Nova Scotia's system of economic and social supports. Unfortunately, many Nova Scotians face significant economic, social, or other personal barriers in the pursuit of PSE and the many benefits that flow from it. Depending on individual circumstances, facing just one of these barriers could be enough to make PSE an unattainable goal. The sad reality is that many Nova Scotians face multiple barriers at the same time, which perpetuates cycles of multi-generational disadvantage. Based on our analysis, we make a total of 17 recommendations that would allow us to better understand the social barriers to post-secondary access, prepare adolescents for success at the post-secondary level, and make post-secondary institutions more welcoming, inclusive environments for students from historically underrepresented communities.

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Statement of Values Page

The foundation upon which Students Nova Scotia is built is the belief that postsecondary education can play a fundamental role in allowing both the individual and society to realize their full potential. Students Nova Scotia's values are pillars built on this foundation, and the organization shapes its decision-making around these values.

ACCESSIBILITY: Every qualified Nova Scotia resident who wishes to pursue postsecondary education should be able to do so, irrespective of their financial situation, socioeconomic or ethnic background, physical, psychological or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or any other factor exogenous to qualification.

AFFORDABILITY: The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student, restrict their ability to pursue the career path they choose, or make them financially unable to live in the community that they choose.

QUALITY: Policies, programs, and services in post-secondary education should meet student expectations to help prepare them for lifelong success, including in their citizenship, careers, and personal well-being.

STUDENT VOICE: Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting their post-secondary system's direction via engagement through their representative student bodies, within the post-secondary institutions themselves, and through the broader democratic process.

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Common Abbreviations

AAWG	Access and Affordability Working Group
ACSD	African Canadian Services Division (provincial government)
ALI	Africentric Learning Institute
ANSA	African Nova Scotian Affairs (provincial government)
B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education
BEA	Black Educators' Association
BLAC	Black Learners' Advisory Committee
CACE	Council for African Canadian Education
CBU	Cape Breton University
CCTB/NCBS	Canada Child Tax Benefit/National Child Benefit Supplement
CSG-LI	Canada Study Grant for Low-Income Students
CSG-MI	Canada Study Grant for Middle Income Students
CSLP	Canada Student Loans Program
CNS	Careers Nova Scotia (provincial government)
DCS	Department of Community Services (provincial government)
EECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (provincial government)
EIBI	Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (for Autism)
ESIA	Employment Support and Income Assistance
DBDLI	Delmore 'Buddy' Daye Learning Institute
FN	First Nations
GST/HST	GST/HST tax credit
INAC	Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (federal government)
IPP	Individualized Program Plan

LAE	Department of Labour and Advanced Education (provincial government)
LPC	Liberal Party of Canada
MK	Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey or Mi'kmaw
MMIW	Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women
MPHEC	Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission
NHS	National Household Survey
NSCB	Nova Scotia Child Benefit
NSCC	Nova Scotia Community College
NSSAP	Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program
OAA	Office of Aboriginal Affairs (provincial government)
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
P-12	Grade Primary to Twelve Education
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PSDS	Post-Secondary Disability Services (provincial government)
PSE	Post-secondary education
PSSSP	Post-Secondary Student Support Program
RESP	Registered Education Savings Plan
SES	Socioeconomic status
SFA	Student financial assistance
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
TYP	Transition Year Program
UCCB	Universal Childcare Benefit

Introduction

StudentsNS prioritizes the *accessibility* of post-secondary education (PSE) as one of its four foundational values because we believe that education is critical to the growth and development of individual Nova Scotians, their families, communities, and the Province as a whole. Access to PSE has an impact on a person’s future quality of life and economic independence, while a highly educated labour force promotes economic growth and increased productivity. Furthermore, in societies where economic benefits are distributed more equitably, greater social cohesion is also evident.

Unfortunately, many Canadians face significant economic, social, or other personal barriers in pursuit of PSE and the many benefits that flow from it. Extensive research on social policy literature indicates that these barriers reflect larger societal barriers to social mobility. A person’s socioeconomic background, ethnicity, language, culture, citizenship, level of parental education, disability, age, gender, and/or geographic origin may all influence the likelihood of pursuing PSE. Personal traits and life histories can influence our general attitudes toward education, our beliefs about the costs and rewards of pursuing PSE, and our level of comfort in a PSE setting.

“Depending on individual circumstances, facing just one of these barriers can make PSE an unattainable goal.”

Depending on individual circumstances, facing just one of these barriers can make PSE an unattainable goal. The sad truth is that many Nova Scotians face multiple barriers at the same time, which contributes to the vicious cycle of multigenerational disadvantage – when one generation is unable to reach its full potential; it becomes more likely that the existing disadvantage will be passed on to the next generation, and so on. For individuals facing such barriers, successfully attaining a PSE credential can make a difference in helping to break this cycle.

In light of the barriers outlined above, there have been some notable local efforts to understand and address the barriers faced by specific racialized groups, including African Nova Scotians (e.g. the BLAC Report, 1994) and the Indigenous peoples of our Province (e.g. through the work of Nova Scotia’s First Nations Education Authority, Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey). Furthermore, there are many local examples of targeted programs and services aimed at improving access to PSE for specific historically disadvantaged groups (e.g. Indigenous studies

through CBU's Unama'ki College; Dalhousie's Transition Year Program for Indigenous and African Nova Scotians; grants for students with disabilities).

Despite everything we know about access to PSE in Nova Scotia, there is a lot we do not. This paper will attempt to fill some of the knowledge gaps in relation to access to PSE in Nova Scotia. The major barriers that exist in Nova Scotia and their impacts on the post-secondary participation of historically underrepresented or disadvantaged groups will be described. The public policies and programs aimed at preparing Nova Scotians for PSE, primarily the public school system, are critically examined. Additionally, other policies, programs, and community initiatives that make up our system of economic and social supports (including several specific policies and programs of the Department of Community Services) are evaluated. Finally, institution-driven access initiatives and student supports that assist students in their transition to PSE and promote academic persistence and student success are discussed.

Based on our analyses, we propose a total of 17 recommendations aimed at promoting broader access to Nova Scotia's PSE system for individuals facing one or more social barriers. The recommendations are focused on three broad areas of action.

- 1. To develop a comprehensive dataset that describes capturing the full range of personal characteristics and potential barriers to PSE access faced by Nova Scotians.**
- 2. To build a public education system (and complimentary child and family-serving systems) that is inclusive to Nova Scotians from all backgrounds, supportive of the many diverse needs of students in the modern classroom, and cognizant that children will be more successful at school if their families are supported to be successful at home.**
- 3. To close existing gaps in financial aid that can reinforce the social barriers to PSE access.**

Given that access to post-secondary education is such a crucial determinant of social mobility in our modern economy, it is unjust to deny any person of their opportunity to pursue PSE regardless of their personal background. For Nova Scotians from historically oppressed or disadvantaged groups – Indigenous peoples and African Nova Scotians – we have a special collective responsibility to help create pathways to higher learning. This is not only the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. A more educated Nova Scotia would be home to a more self-sufficient and independent population, all while greatly diminishing incidence of “disadvantage.” Nova Scotia has the potential to become a more unified province with a much stronger and truly “diversified” local economy.

Key Determinants of Post-Secondary Access

StudentsNS prioritizes the *accessibility* of post-secondary education as one of its four foundational values because we believe that education is critical to the growth and development of individual Nova Scotians, their families, communities, and the Province as a whole. If all of this is true, then we have a responsibility to create opportunities for as many Nova Scotians as possible to pursue PSE. To do otherwise, either by deliberate action or further inaction, is to accept that people facing economic, social, or other barriers in life don't deserve many benefits of higher education.

It is easy to say that PSE should be maximally inclusive. The question to be asked is how do we actually achieve this reality? How can we ensure that every Nova Scotian is enabled to pursue their desired educational path? Furthermore, how can we ensure that every young Nova Scotian, regardless of their personal background, is provided with the tools and resources needed to succeed at the post-secondary level and beyond?

To begin answering such questions, we must first seek to understand the present state of PSE access in Nova Scotia. What does the PSE student population look like? Who is included in it and who tends to be excluded? What are the key factors that make some Nova Scotians more likely to attend PSE relative to others? The rest of this section deals with these issues, drawing on lessons from recent research literature and PSE student population statistics.

PRINCIPLE: Every qualified Nova Scotia resident who wishes to pursue post-secondary education should be able to do so, irrespective of their financial situation, socioeconomic or ethnic background, physical, psychological or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or any other factor other than qualification.

1. Factors Influencing PSE Access in Nova Scotia

In Canada, we are fortunate to have a relatively large community of skilled researchers with an active interest in PSE policy issues. The quality of PSE access statistics available to us, however, is quite limited. Due to this limitation, the data presented throughout this section is only a preliminary picture of Nova Scotia's post-secondary access landscape. We focus our attention on a number of identifiable demographic groups facing known barriers to PSE access and draw upon the best available data to identify these subgroups within the provincial PSE student population. Wherever possible, relevant research literature is highlighted to help derive some conclusions about the PSE access concerns most relevant to Nova Scotia.

I. Socioeconomic Status

CONCERN: The lack of data on the post-secondary participation of different demographic groups hinders effective policy analysis on the accessibility and affordability of PSE for Nova Scotians.

There is a significant body of evidence on the socioeconomic status (SES) variables that impact PSE participation. The two variables cited most often, which are related, are *parental education* and *family income*. These two factors are related – individuals with a PSE credential tend to earn more in the labour market and the children of more educated/affluent parents are, more likely to pursue higher education (Finnie, Mueller and Wismer, 2015). Going one step further, those same children also tend to complete their degrees and take less time to finish in comparison to PSE students from low SES backgrounds (Andres and Adamuti-Trache, 2008).

These results are supported by many other studies, but they also make intuitive sense. Parents with higher education would understand the benefits of PSE, having experienced them first-hand, better than anyone. As such, it makes sense that parents would encourage their children to pursue higher education as well. PSE-educated parents tend to possess the social capital (i.e. the knowledge, skills, and non-financial resources) to effectively guide their children along the path to pursue their own PSE journey. Parental education is crucial to PSE participation.

It is also important to examine the second variable of the SES equation: family income. The cost of PSE has grown enormously, especially since the early 1990s. More affluent parents will typically be in a better financial position to help their children with these rising costs. Not only do they have resources to help pay for tuition, books, and living costs, more affluent parents may also be able to make advanced educational investments in high quality enrichment programs (e.g. child care, tutoring, music, sports)[1] and savings programs like the federal government's Registered Education Savings Program (RESP) (see StudentsNS, 2013a).

For children of lower income and/or less educated parents, the situation can be very different. Parents with less income may be less able to invest in enrichment programs and savings vehicles for their children prior to PSE. Meanwhile, parents with less education may not see the value in making such investments (even if they have the financial resources to do so). If or when a child reaches the PSE stage, lower income parents typically do not have \$15,000-\$20,000 or more in disposable income to absorb the annual cost of attending college or university (see Table 1).

Table 1. Major Costs for Representative Nova Scotia University and Community (2014/15), StudentsNS 2015a

Type	Cost		Source
	University	College	
Tuition	\$6,440	\$3,040	StatsCan average university tuition and NSCC diploma tuition, 2014-15 (this does not reflect discounts provided through the Nova Scotia University Student Bursary)
Other Fees	\$793	\$600	MPHEC ancillary fees average (excludes student health insurance fees), 2014-15
Rent (academic year)	\$4,040	\$4,545	CMHC Average Provincial Rent, 2014 (Shared 2 bedroom cost = half of full cost)
Food Costs	\$2,416	\$2,718	Feed Nova Scotia, National Nutritious Food Basket, Average Cost for an Individual 19-24 years old, 2012-13 – inflated to 2014-15
Books and Supplies	\$2,157		CSLP, adjusted cost allowance to \$1,800 in 2011/12 – inflated to 2014/15 costs
Incidentals	\$2,500		Including items like health insurance, personal care & hygiene items, local transportation costs, other misc.
Total	\$18,346	\$15,560	

On the financial front, lower and middle-income students do have access to Student Financial Assistance (SFA) programs to help meet the upfront costs of PSE. Even with these programs, however, it would be wrong to suggest that finances are never an issue for lower SES families; the SFA benefits available do not always meet the full costs of attending PSE (see footnote and Section 3.2 below)[2] and typically leave students with significant post-graduate debt. Higher SES students typically do not face either of these financial challenges.[3]

It is apparent that both family income and parental education can be important determinants of PSE access but is one *more important* than the other? Using multivariable regression analyses, numerous studies confirm that the answer is yes. When family income is used as the sole SES factor in a regression equation it has a large and statistically significant impact on PSE participation. In comparison, when parental education is also included it takes over as the most

important predictive variable in the equation and the impact of income is much reduced (Drolet, 2005; Andres and Adamuti-Trache, 2008; Turcotte, 2011). These findings lend further support to the above ‘family culture’ hypothesis – where one or more educated parents is a much stronger predictor of PSE participation than family income.

The available data on Nova Scotia’s PSE population creates a somewhat cloudier picture. For example, 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) data[4] indicates that low-income students are actually *overrepresented* in Nova Scotia’s university population relative to the share of low-income persons in Nova Scotia (see Table 2a). This is true across all of the age groups surveyed, except the 41-64 segment that represent only 10% of the university population.

Table 2a. University Students from Low-Income Families (LICO after taxes) (2011)

Population	Total 17+		17-21		22-29		30-40		41-64	
Nova Scotia	66,040	8.9%	9,560	16.0%	13,035	15.4%	9,840	8.3%	30,415	9.0%
University	8,895	20.4%	3,385	20.3%	4,600	28.0%	715	12.7%	190	4.4%

The total number of low-income students (8,895) is worthy of further scrutiny because it is nearly double the actual number of SFA recipients who qualified for a Low-Income Canada Study Grant (CSG-LI) in 2011 (4,624 students). These two conflicting data points raise at least two possible explanations: that the flawed NHS survey has drastically overestimated the number of low-income university students in Nova Scotia; or that almost half of all low-income university students either did not apply for SFA in 2011 or they did not qualify for the CSG-LI grant (e.g. graduate and professional students do not qualify). Of course, there are reasons why some low-income students might reasonably be expected to attend university without using government SFA programs. Perhaps due to lack of awareness, debt aversion, or even mistrust of government institutions; it is, however difficult to believe that thousands of such students would not take advantage of government SFA programs in any given year.

This discrepancy is the first of many examples of this study’s foundational finding. The current available data on so-called underrepresented or marginalized social groups cannot be trusted to represent the true landscape of PSE accessibility in Nova Scotia. While it is *possible* that NHS data accurately reflects the low-income portion of our PSE population it is also *highly unlikely*. If the hope is to construct policy that more effectively promotes broad PSE access, there needs to be more confidence in the data being used to identify the social groups facing the largest barriers.

CONCERN: Data describing university and community college student populations are not comparable to one another, which complicates comparisons and system-wide analyses.

Much of the data we have on the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) population^[5] is unfortunately not directly comparable to the university data. We have only proxies for the number of low-income students (see Table 2b) like the number of so-called *first generation students* and the number of *sponsored students* attending NSCC. The former group are those students whose parents never attended PSE; and while we cannot automatically assume these students are from low-income backgrounds, it has been shown statistically that they are more likely to be. In 2010 (the nearest comparable year), 45% of incoming NSCC students were first generation (though it has since dropped to 37%).

Table 2b. NSCC student low-income proxies

NSCC Students	First Generation	Sponsored		
		Community Services	Employment Nova Scotia	First Nations
#	3,761	413	916	194
% of pop.	35.0%	3.8%	8.5%	1.8%

The sponsored students are those attending NSCC with support from Careers Nova Scotia (CNS), Department of Community Service (DCS), or a First Nation, most of which will also be classified as low-income persons based on the criteria for sponsorship (see Section 3.4 for more information on these programs). In 2011, NSCC enrolled nearly 2,200 such individuals or 21.5% of the total NSCC population. For comparison, NSSAP reported that only 13% of NSCC students received CSG-LI grants in 2011. Having more confidence in the accuracy of both data sets, the discrepancy in this case is almost certainly the result of the proxy nature of specific measures available; in other words, some sponsored students likely do not qualify as low-income and some low-income students likely did not apply for SFA even though they were eligible.

Taking all of the above into account, it is very likely that NSCC has a larger share of low-income students than universities do; though it is impossible to be certain of this conclusion without more specific and more comparable data on students' family incomes.

II. Ethnic, Cultural, or Linguistic Minority Populations

The modern nation state of Canada, one of the richest countries in the globalized world economy, is often held as an exemplar social democracy that values multiculturalism, compassion, and reason. Such acknowledgements have been heard more frequently since Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party took power in the 2015 federal election. Some of this praise may be well deserved; however, if we are to accept it, we must also acknowledge that

multiculturalism has not always been central to the Canadian identity, including the fact that racism has always been a central part of it.

Canada’s history with racism begins with the violence and exploitation of Indigenous peoples during European colonialism. Racism in Canada did not end there, but rather it continues to this day as we finally begin to contend with the legacy of everything that has happened since (through processes like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada).

As in the rest of Canada, racism is still alive in present-day Nova Scotia and its victims include Indigenous people, African Nova Scotians, recent immigrants to Canada, and visiting students from around the world. Though all of these groups can be targeted by racism, not all receive attention in this paper because some face larger PSE barriers than others. For example, Nova Scotia’s racialized minority population – which by Statistics Canada’s definition does not include Indigenous peoples or African Nova Scotians – is significantly overrepresented in the PSE system because a large proportion of this diverse group attends university (see Table 3).[6] This finding is consistent with numerous studies from Canada and elsewhere (Chui and Maheux, 2011; Finnie, Mueller, and Wismer, 2015).

Table 3. University Students from Racialized Population (excluding Aboriginal and African Heritage)

Population	Total 17+		17-21		22-29		30-40		41-64	
Nova Scotia	20,230	2.7%	2,910	4.9%	5,060	6.0%	4,440	3.7%	6,395	1.9%
University	4,980	11.4%	1,495	8.9%	2,575	15.7%	680	12.1%	225	5.2%

Nova Scotia is home to a number of distinct ethnic, cultural, or linguistic minority populations that do require special attention. Ideally, each one of these groups would be the subject of its own comprehensive research project in collaboration with the affected population. The aim of this current project, however, is to introduce some of the key access issues particular to each group. In the future, we can then build off this work in partnership with the affected communities.

a. Indigenous Nova Scotians

CONCERN: Indigenous Nova Scotians under 40 are underrepresented in Nova Scotia’s universities.

CONCERN: The Post-Secondary Student Support Program is chronically underfunded, causing many First Nations youth to forego or delay entry into post-secondary education.

CONCERN: The recruitment strategies of post-secondary institutions often fail to address the questions/concerns of Indigenous youth and their communities.

Most Canadians are aware that the crimes committed against Indigenous peoples did not end with early colonialism. The institutionalized racism of the *Indian Act*, the Residential Schools system, and the more recent tragedy of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) phenomenon are other notorious examples of Canada's dark history of abuse, exploitation, and indifference toward Indigenous people. Each racist act committed against Indigenous peoples has created new traumas and reinforced old traumas experienced by previous generations. The scale and frequency of racist acts committed against Indigenous peoples throughout Canada's history are an inherent barrier to reconciliation. This barrier must be properly addressed and overcome together as a nation if we are to truly become the enlightened, compassionate country we often proclaim ourselves to be.

Nova Scotia's founding people are members of the Mi'kmaw nation who have called Nova Scotia[7] home for thousands of years. The Mi'kmaw nation is comprised of 13 First Nations (a.k.a. Bands), the formal governance units of the Mi'kmaw nation, and further subdivided into 42 geographic communities (a.k.a. reserves) located throughout the province (see Table 4a-c)(Province of Nova Scotia, 2016a).

Nova Scotia's Indigenous population of almost 34,000 accounts for 3.7% of the total provincial population, with status members of the Mi'kmaw nation comprising the largest share (47% of Indigenous pop./1.8% of N.S. pop.)(see Table 4b/c). The Mi'kmaw nation is split between 36% living in a reserve community and 64% living off reserve.

Table 4a. First Nations Communities in Nova Scotia

First Nation	Total	On reserve	Off reserve	Geographic Location
Acadia	1498	224	1274	Yarmouth, Yarmouth Co.
Annapolis Valley	283	119	164	Cambridge, Kings County
Bear River	330	106	224	Bear River, Digby Co.
Eskasoni	4314	3689	625	Eskasoni, Cape Breton Co.
Glooscap	359	89	270	Hantsport, Hants Co.
Membertou	1430	909	521	Sydney, Cape Breton Co.
Millbrook	1762	879	883	Truro, Colchester Co.
Paqtnkek	565	427	138	Afton, Antigonish Co.
Pictou Landing	650	498	152	Trenton, Pictou Co.
Potlokek	714	581	133	Chapel Island, Richmond Co.
Sipekne'katik	2554	1296	1258	Indian Brook, Hants Co.
Wagmatcook	810	633	177	Wagmatcook, Victoria Co.
Waycobah	976	893	83	Whycocomagh, Inverness Co.

Table 4b. Nova Scotia's Indigenous Population (All identities)

	#	% NS Pop	% Indig. Pop
Aboriginal identity	33,845	3.70%	100%
First Nations (single identity (includes Mi'kmaw (MK))	<u>21,895</u>	2.40%	64.7%
Métis single identity	10,050	1.10%	29.7%
Inuk (Inuit) single identity	695	0.1%	2.1%
Multiple Aboriginal identities	230	0.03%	0.7%
Aboriginal identities not included elsewhere	980	0.1%	2.9%

Table 4c. Nova Scotia's First Nations Population (Including Mi'kmaw (MK))

	#	%NS Pop	% Indigenous Pop	% FN Status	%Mi'kmaw
First Nations (FN)	<u>21,895</u>	2.4%	64.7%	100%	n/a
MK non-status, other FN	5,923	0.7%	17.5%	27.1%	n/a
Mi'kmaw FN Status	15,972	1.8%	47.2%	72.9%	n/a
On reserve MK	10,160	1.1%	30.0%	46.4%	63.6%
Off-reserve MK	5,812	0.6%	17.2%	26.5%	36.4%

The injustices suffered by Indigenous peoples throughout Canada's history have contributed to a society in which Indigenous Canadians are more likely to live in poverty, have children apprehended by child welfare authorities, and/or be incarcerated. In addition, they are less likely to finish high school, attend a post-secondary institution, and/or be employed in the labour market.

Every Nova Scotian, whether from Indigenous or settler ancestry, shares this history with the rest of Canada. There is a collective responsibility for fully engaging in Truth and Reconciliation in the years ahead. This is the only way we will ever build the trust needed to work together toward a common future.

StudentsNS is committed to doing its own part to advance the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (see Summary Box 1 for a listing of education-related “Calls to Action” in the final TRC report).

We begin here by highlighting some specific inequities faced by Indigenous peoples within Nova Scotia’s PSE system (see Table 4d). Within the university system, Indigenous Nova Scotians (over 17) participate in similar proportion to their share of the provincial population (3.4% v. 3.3%). When we dig deeper, however, we see that Indigenous students in the more “typical” PSE age ranges (17-21; 22-29) are underrepresented (MPHEC, 2016) (StudentsNS 2015b). In fact, the overall proportionate representation is driven entirely by overrepresentation in the oldest age group (40-64). Unfortunately, the NSCC data is not broken down by age cohort but it does indicate Indigenous overrepresentation overall. Given that, in general, the average age at NSCC is considerably older than in university, it is likely that the Indigenous NSCC population is skewed towards being older as well.

Table 4d. University Students of Aboriginal Identity

Population	Total 17+		17-21		22-29		30-40		41-64	
Nova Scotia	24,390	3.3%	3,345	5.6%	3,725	4.4%	4,810	4.0%	9,940	2.9%
University	1,485	3.4%	580	3.5%	540	3.3%	175	3.1%	180	4.1%

Table 4e. NSCC Students of Aboriginal Identity

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Enrolment	408	425	458	507	559
% of NSCC pop.	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%

Compared with other subpopulations, this is an atypical age profile for university participation, but it is not entirely unexpected. First, it makes intuitive sense that a group underrepresented in earlier age cohorts would attend in larger numbers later – the pull of PSE is strong – but it is more interesting to consider *why* Indigenous Nova Scotians attend in smaller proportions earlier in life. We know that, historically, Indigenous peoples have completed high school at lower rates than the general population. This is one reason that certain individuals might pursue PSE later than the “norm”.

Summary Box 1. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action on Education, Language, and Culture

Education

We call upon the Government of Canada to:

1. Repeal Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada.
2. Develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
3. Eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.
4. Prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.
5. Draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:
 - i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.
 - ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
 - iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
 - iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
 - v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
 - vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.
 - vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.
6. Provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.
7. Develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families in cooperation with provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments.

Language and Culture

1. We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.

Education for Reconciliation

1. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:
 - i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for K-12 students.
 - ii. Provide the necessary funding to PSE institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
 - iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods.
 - iv. Establish assistant deputy minister positions (or higher) dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.
2. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:
 - i. Developing and implementing K-12 curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
 - ii. Sharing information and best practices on curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
 - iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
 - iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to above.
3. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require education on comparative religious studies, including a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.
4. We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.

Another well-documented explanation is the federal government's longstanding underinvestment in the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), which administers financial aid to First Nations students with so-called "Indian status," as defined by the *Indian Act*. Limited funding often means that individual First Nations must limit the number of individuals they can fund in any given year, which encourages some to forego attending PSE until they can receive funding from their band (INAC, 2016). Often the only alternative to this would be to seek funding through the provincial SFA system, which, unlike PSSSP funding, must usually be paid back.

Of course, this explanation cannot apply in all cases since only about half of all Indigenous Nova Scotians are eligible for PSSSP to begin with (i.e. those with First Nations status, as well as Inuit). For many other non-status Indigenous people, reasons for not attending PSE could include lack of trust in public institutions (including the SFA programs); learning environments unsuited to Indigenous culture and ways of learning (Doyle-Bedwell and Farrimond, 2009); and the same issues that apply to non-Indigenous peoples (i.e. lack of awareness/information, conscious choice/lack of interest) (Mendelsohn, 2006). Additionally, a recent Ontario study completed by a team Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) ethnographers highlights many of the key barriers faced by Indigenous youth transitioning to PSE (see Summary Box 2) (Restoule, Mashford-Pringle, Chacaby, et al. 2013).

One major flaw in the local Indigenous PSE access data is that it does not allow for differentiation between subgroups (e.g. Mi'kmaw/Metis/other affiliation; status/non-status; on/off reserve). This limits our understanding of possible barriers existing beneath the total Indigenous population level.

Summary Box 2. Key barriers faced by Indigenous youth (Ashinaabe, Ojibwe) transitioning to PSE in Ontario

According to this study, Aboriginal students across Canada aspire to pursue PSE but are often suspicious of education as an institution. To overcome this, the study asserts that governments and PSE institutions must begin working to establish relationships with Aboriginal youth and their communities much earlier than the final year of high school. In addition to information often arriving too late to be useful, Aboriginal youth surveyed for the study also indicated that universities typically provide vague information that does not speak to their needs as students. The study provides a number of recommendations suggested by the youth themselves to help address these issues:

- Everyday issues for aboriginal students (e.g. band funding, scholarships, student assistance), housing, food banks, child care, and part-time jobs, etc.
- Posters should include successful Aboriginal PSE graduates from local communities and info about specific cultural supports available.
- Provide detailed information about what cultural supports and academic aids are available at recruiting PSE institutions (e.g. Elders on campus, Aboriginal cultural events, and cultural spaces).
- Involve Aboriginal youth in the recruitment process and create space to talk about more than just the importance of attending PSE.
- Provide PSE information tailored specifically toward answering common "What to expect" questions from Aboriginal youth including a summary of the application process, a step-by-step through the first year process.
- Circulate information much earlier in secondary school and devote time to discussing PSE options (i.e., Grade 9).

b. African Nova Scotians**CONCERN: African Nova Scotians continue to face significant barriers to academic success and post-secondary access.**

Nova Scotia has been home to people of African descent since the very beginning of its colonial history – over 400 years – and we are all richer today for their many contributions to our province. As of 2011, there are 20,790 African Nova Scotians in the province that represent 2.3% of our total population (a larger share than the Mi'kmaw alone but smaller than the total Indigenous population). Four in five African Nova Scotians were born in the province and three quarters are Canadians of at least three generations. Smaller shares of the African Nova Scotian population were born elsewhere in Canada or immigrated recently (Province of Nova Scotia, 2016b).

Most Nova Scotians are somewhat familiar with the province’s history as a refuge for people escaping American wars and slavery; for the story of the Black Loyalists who, in the 1780s, formed the largest settlement of free Blacks in North America; and for the many singular achievements of African Nova Scotians – in literature, education, politics, religious thought, athletics, and more – throughout our shared history (Black Loyalists Heritage Society, 2015; Halifax Public Library, 2016).

Like Nova Scotia’s Indigenous peoples, African Nova Scotians have also borne the brunt of racism, violence, and systematic oppression by the European settler population and our governments. The original Black Loyalists were ‘welcomed’ to Nova Scotia as free people but received horribly racist treatment by locals (and little help from government), such that many of them ultimately chose to leave for uncertain futures elsewhere. More recently in the 1960s, the Black residents of Africville had their lands appropriated and their community destroyed by the City of Halifax (Nelson, 2009). Today’s African Nova Scotians live with the legacy of these events. Many are trapped in a multigenerational cycle of poverty, unequal access to education, and lack of employment opportunity.

In this context, the PSE access data available strikes a relatively positive note. African Nova Scotians represented in universities and the NSCC are in proportion to their share of the provincial population (Table 5a/b).

Table 5a. University Students of African Heritage

Population	Total 17+		17-21		22-29		30-40		41-64	
Nova Scotia	14,095	1.9%	1,720	2.9%	2,315	2.7%	2,580	2.2%	5,610	1.7%
University	1,160	2.7%	460	2.8%	415	2.5%	185	3.3%	105	2.4%

Table 5b. NSCC Students of African Canadian Heritage					
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Enrolment	420	419	437	449	449
% of NSCC population	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%

Like Indigenous Nova Scotians, African Nova Scotians are considerably overrepresented in older age cohorts (30 and above). This might reflect the group’s historical underrepresentation in recent years, with the positive development that younger African Nova Scotians seem to be reaching PSE on similar timelines to the general population. This data is arguably one of the positive legacies of the 1994 Black Learners’ Advisory Committee (BLAC) [*“Report on Education: Redressing Inequity – Empowering Black Learners.”*](#) which generated 46 recommendations aimed at addressing systemic racism in Nova Scotia’s education system and improving educational outcomes for African Nova Scotians students.

The 2009 follow-up study by Dr. Enid Lee and Clem Marshall, [“Reality Check: A Review of key program areas in the BLAC Report”](#) (Enidlee Consultants, 2009) provides considerable insight into both the progress made and the continued areas of need for African Nova Scotians learners since 1994 (see Summary Box 3 for the key findings of this report). Based on these findings, the authors make a total of 68 new recommendations targeting three areas for improvement: performance measurement and monitoring; system reorganization and resourcing; and communication/collaboration with community members and partner organizations[8] (see full report for detailed recommendations).

Summary Box 3 – Key Findings of the BLAC Report Review, 15 Years On (adapted from Enidlee Consultants, 2009)

Effective programs and services for ANS students have been established and are making a positive impact on student achievement (e.g. ANS Student Scholarship Program, the Student Support Worker Program, and English 12: African Heritage course).

New course offerings and programs have improved education for students of all backgrounds (e.g. English 12: African Heritage, African Canadian Studies 11), and the work of the Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding, and Human Rights coordinators.

The BEA's Regional Educators Program (community supports for ANS parents) and the Cultural and Academic Enrichment Program (academic/personal supports for ANS students) both meet important social/cultural needs but require reorganization and additional resources to further enhance the educational achievement of ANS students.

The number of ANS students on an Individual Program Plan (IPP), large caseloads of Student Support Workers, and/or unaddressed racism—may still limit achievement of ANS students.

African Nova Scotian communities believe that ANS students are overrepresented within the population of students on Individual Program Plan (IPP), which is seen by some to limit future educational opportunities.

CACE has helped numerous ANS students to achieve post-secondary education and has disseminated useful information on Africentric education; but it must communicate more effectively with the African Canadian communities it represents.

Quantitative data on ANS students is limited, which has frustrated efforts to understand their learning and achievement outcomes.

Since the 2009 review, the province has taken important steps to establish baseline academic achievement data for African Nova Scotian students in elementary schools, which it reported on for the first time in 2014 ([DBDLI, 2014](#)). The data revealed clear achievement gaps between African Nova Scotians and the total student population with respect to literacy and numeracy. Based on grade 3 reading performance norms, 55% of African Nova Scotian students met or exceeded expectations as opposed to 70% of the total student population. Similarly, based on

grade 4 math performance norms, 60% of African Nova Scotian students met or exceeded expectations, compared with 74% overall. Though we do not yet have data on later years, it is unlikely that this achievement gap is closed in later school years. Thus, despite the fact that a proportionate share of African Nova Scotians now seem to be pursuing PSE (see Table 5a/b), it seems likely that our education system continues to fail in preparing significant numbers of African Nova Scotian students to pursue PSE as well as it does other groups of students. We can and must do better.

c. Francophone Nova Scotians

Nova Scotia’s Acadian heritage and francophone community includes 34,585 people with French as a mother tongue, which accounts for 3.8% of the provincial population (Province of Nova Scotia, 2016c). Members of this community are spread throughout the province, forming local majority populations in communities like Clare, Argyle, Isle Madame, and Cheticamp. More than a third of Nova Scotia’s francophone population lives in the Halifax capital region (Table 6).

Table 6. University Students, Francophone Mother Tongue

Population	Total 17+		17-21		22-29		30-40		41-64	
Nova Scotia	27,035	3.6%	1,235	2.1%	1,985	2.3%	3,810	3.2%	12,940	3.8%
University	1,175	2.7%	320	1.9%	345	2.1%	305	5.4%	185	4.2%

Prior to 1764, the Acadian Nova Scotian population suffered at the hands of the English majority, largely because of intermittent conflict between the colonial powers of England and France. The worst episode in this history was *La Grande Derangement* that resulted in the expulsion of at least 10,000 Acadians to the American Colonies and France. Since those early conflicts, the remaining Acadian population and later francophone migrants have largely prospered as key participants in Nova Scotia’s natural resource and cultural industries.

University access for Nova Scotia’s francophone minority population is roughly proportionate to the francophone community’s share of the total population, though some age cohorts are slightly underrepresented. It is difficult to conclude that francophone access to PSE is a significant issue in Nova Scotia, as francophones are the only minority population in Nova Scotia to have a dedicated public education authority ([Le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial](#)) and post-secondary institution (Université Sainte Anne). Still, as a group, we must continue to be attentive to educational opportunities for the francophone community. Unfortunately, we have no data available on the participation of francophones in NSCC programs.

III. Other Personal Barriers

Numerous other PSE access barriers have been identified in literature and practice, including the influence of geography, disability status, age/family status, and gender identity. While StudentsNS has done significant research on several of these issues previously, they are addressed again as part of this position paper.

a. Geographic Origin

CONCERN: Nova Scotians from rural communities are less likely to attend university than people from urban areas.

Our recent report on Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) highlighted its critical role in creating localized access to PSE in rural communities and as a re-entry point for older Nova Scotians (i.e. mature students) making a return to formal education (StudentsNS, 2015b).[9] The student population data shows that Nova Scotians from urban regions are overrepresented in the university system (80% of students and 65% of the population), while rural origin students are modestly overrepresented in the NSCC system (38% of students and 35% of the population) (Table 7a/b). This data confirms that the NSCC system is a crucial avenue of PSE access for rural origin students. The data also raises the question about whether rural students have truly equal access to Nova Scotia’s university system. In our conversations with rural Nova Scotian students – of those that “made it” to university – some suggested that universities could continue to improve by intensifying recruitment activities at rural high schools, for example.

Table 7a. University Students by Geographic Origin

Population	Total 17+	17-21	22-29	30-40	41-64					
Urban										
Nova Scotia	484,550	65.0%	40,990	68.6%	62,815	74.3%	82,430	69.2%	214,260	63.5%
University	34,475	79.3%	12,360	74.0%	13,825	84.0%	4,675	83.0%	3,325	76.0%
Rural										
Nova Scotia	260,890	35.0%	18,760	31.4%	21,760	25.7%	36,765	30.8%	123,415	36.5%
University	9,025	20.7%	4,345	26.0%	2,570	15.7%	955	17.00%	1,045	23.9%

Table 7b. NSCC Students by Geographic Origin

	#	%		#	%
Urban	6,594	62%	Rural	4,094	38%

b. Age

Our previous work on SFA programs in Nova Scotia also dealt with mature students and the financial and other resource constraints they face, particularly when they have dependent children (StudentsNS, 2013a; see Section 3.2).[10] Financial constraints are, without question, the largest issue facing this group and the recommendations in that report would go a long way to address these concerns. Age data for Nova Scotia’s university and NSCC student populations confirm that the vast majority of PSE students are under 30 (76% of university students and 80% NSCC students) (see Table 8a/b). The key age difference between university and NSCC student populations is that the university population skews younger, presumably because more young Nova Scotians pursue university directly from high school.

8a. University Students by Age										
Population	Total 17+		17-21		22-29		30-40		41-64	
Nova Scotia	745,435	100%	59,750	8%	84,580	11%	119,200	16%	337,670	45%
University	43,500	100%	16,705	38%	16,400	38%	5,625	13%	4,365	10%

8b. NSCC Students by Age					
	Total	Under 20	20-29	30-39	Over 40
#	10,745	2,925	5,499	1,306	1,001
% total	100%	27%	51%	12%	9%

c. Disability Status

CONCERN: Nova Scotians affected by disabilities continue to be underrepresented in our post-secondary student population.

Our 2014 “Disable the Label” project thoroughly examined the societal and systemic barriers to PSE participation experienced by persons affected by disabilities (StudentsNS, 2014).[11] As a result of more targeted financial support, improved personal support programs, and academic accommodations policy reforms, great strides have been achieved in granting access to PSE for this group in recent years. Despite these improvements, we still observe underrepresentation of students with disabilities across all age cohorts at university (Table 9a), in community college (Table 9b), and within the labour force as well.

9a. University Students Affected by Disability										
Population	Total 17+		17-21		22-29		30-40		41-64	
Nova Scotia	363,040	48.7%	9,375	15.7%	12,805	15%	23,970	20.1%	166,650	49%

University	5,495	13%	1,390	8.3%	1,490	9.1%	785	14%	1,375	31.5%
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9b. NSCC Students Affected by Disability					
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Enrolment	1,163	970	1,097	1,278	1,333
% of total enrolment	11%	9%	10%	12%	12%

d. Gender

CONCERN: Low levels of post-secondary participation by young Nova Scotian males lags behind the participation of their female peers.

CONCERN: Females are underrepresented in certain programs and disciplines in academia, many of which coincide with higher earning fields of employment such as science, engineering, public administration, and business.

The available data on Nova Scotia’s PSE students adequately describes the binary sex characteristics (male/female) of the student body but the data tell us almost nothing about the representation of non-binary gender identities. Consistent with data from the literature, female students represent a strong majority (58%) of Nova Scotia’s university population (see Table 10a) and a slight majority of NSCC students as well (51%) (see Table 10b).

The high levels of female PSE participation observed in Nova Scotia (and in many other areas) are unquestionably positive. Young females have clearly received the message that education is key in our increasingly knowledge-based economy. It is the hope that an increasingly educated female population will help to narrow, and eventually abolish, the persistent earning gaps that have long existed between men and women in the labour force. What is of considerable concern in these findings is the lower levels of male participation in PSE. Social and economic researchers worry about the future career prospects for young males who eschew formal education to enter the unskilled labour force. On average, citizens with a high school diploma or less are already struggling to keep up in today’s economy. It is predicted that such a landscape will not become any less competitive in the near future.

10a. University Student Population, by Gender Identity and Field of Study

Gender Identity	Physical, life, resource sciences	Science, Technology, Engineering, Math	Business, management and public administration	Social science, humanities, education	Health and related fields	Visual and performing arts	Other	Total
Female	4,034	1143	4,048	8,960	5,200	721	1,312	25418
	60%	25%	44%	67%	75%	68%	65%	58%
Male	2718	3,491	5232	4436	1,692	335	692	18596
	40%	75%	66%	33%	25%	32%	35%	42%
Unknown								23
								0.05%

10b. NSCC Student Population, by Gender Identity and Field of Study

	Access Programs	Applied Arts & New Media	Business	Health/Human Services	Trades & Technology	Total
Female	1,150	305	1,609	1,859	527	5,450
	63%	32%	67%	86%	15%	51%
Male	650	644	785	279	2,851	5,209
	36%	67%	33%	13%	84%	48%
Unknown	23	7	17	12	27	86
	1.3%	0.7%	0.7%	0.6%	0.8%	0.8%
Total	1,823	956	2,411	2,150	3,405	10,745

Despite the majority female student population, male students continue to make up strong majorities in certain areas of study. Within universities, for example, males comprise 75% of STEM[12] students and 66% of Business, Management, and Public Administration students. At NSCC, males represent 84% of Trades & Technology[13] students and 64% of Applied Arts and New Media[14] students. This data is consistent with previous observations and with various initiatives underway to encourage female participation in specific fields (e.g. the NSCC’s *Women Unlimited* introductory program introducing in trades and technology; *Women in*

Science and Engineering (WISE) Atlantic student mentoring and professional development programs).

Finally, the small number of “unknown” gender identities in the university and NSCC datasets, 0.05% and 0.8% respectively, help to highlight the glaring omission of any data on non-binary gender identities within Nova Scotia’s PSE population. Though we cannot be certain, it is possible that some of these unknown gendered persons were, in fact, non-binary gendered individuals who chose not to identify as either male or female on their institutional records. There are a number of possible reasons for this: male and female may be the only selectable options at some institutions; non-binary students may wish to avoid both personal and institutional forms of discrimination that can accompany the choice to self-identify as neither male nor female; or to identify as a gender that does not correspond to the student’s physical appearance (Gessell, 2014).

Regardless of the reasoning, we can be reasonably certain that the actual number of non-binary gendered PSE students in Nova Scotia is considerably higher than reflected by the students of unknown gender represented in Table 10. According to Dr. Aaron Devor of the University of Victoria, a sociologist and expert in transgender issues, the best estimates suggest that transgendered people make up between 0.5% and 1% of the total population. If this were accurate, then we would expect far more than 46 transgendered students (the number of ‘unknowns’ recorded in Table 10) across the entire Nova Scotia PSE population. PSE campuses, while far from perfect, have enormous potential to be the most accepting environments for transgendered people in Canada. Conversations are spurred into action by engaged groups of students, academics, and human rights advocates seeking accommodations such as gender neutral washrooms, preferred name status on academic records, and non-binary identity options on institutional documents (see, for example, Herberman, 2012).



Public Policies Promoting PSE Access

Going beyond issues StudentsNS is directly concerned with, questions about PSE access require exploring policies targeted to individuals *before* they typically begin to pursue post-secondary studies. It is still necessary to consider the policy targets that are our “usual suspects” – including access initiatives of the Department of Labour and Advanced Education and Nova Scotia’s post-secondary institutions – but it is even more important to examine relevant policies and outcomes related to the education of Nova Scotia’s children. These targets include the Primary-to-12 education system and a number of other programs focused on training (or retraining) certain subpopulations facing economic and/or social vulnerabilities.

1. Primary and Secondary Education

As a prerequisite for the pursuit of PSE in Nova Scotia, most individuals must first successfully complete their studies in the public Primary-12 (P-12) education system while meeting a minimum standard of academic performance for the PSE institution and/or program of their choice. In the wake of the Minister’s Panel on Education (Province of Nova Scotia, 2014) (a.k.a. the Freeman Report), the audacious statement that Nova Scotia’s P-12 system is nearing crisis-status is justifiable. Exactly half of the respondents to the study expressed dissatisfaction with the state of Nova Scotia’s public education system. As an organization that centres on education, these findings are extremely disheartening.

The report’s authors highlight various areas where improvements must be made if Nova Scotia’s children are to be more greatly successful in school and in life (e.g. poor student achievement in math and science, see Summary Box 4). Yet despite the many valid issues raised, it is also true that Nova Scotia performs relatively well on several different metrics of academic attainment and achievement at the secondary school level. For example, Nova Scotia (and its Maritime neighbours) have led the nation in high school graduation rates for well over a decade. The most recent data (2011) indicates that 87% of Nova Scotians in the 20-24 age cohort had obtained a high school diploma (or equivalent); meanwhile, only 8.6% of the same age group were considered “dropouts” – those without a diploma and not currently seeking one – a rate that was slightly below the Canadian average of 8.9%.^[15]

In addition to high graduation rates, Nova Scotia students have consistently performed above average on the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) metrics – a standardized test administered to 15 year olds across developed countries (CMEC, 2012). Although Nova Scotia consistently performs below the Canadian average on PISA, we still perform reasonably well by international standards. Despite the prevailing narratives, this at least confirms that the Nova Scotia public school system has some positive results to build upon.

Summary Box 4: Key Themes and Recommendations of the Freeman Report (highlighted recommendations relate most directly to PSE access)**Theme 1: Strengthen curriculum**

Reduce the number of curriculum outcomes.

Develop new curriculum design model more suited to the modern classroom.

Redesign the early elementary curriculum to focus primarily on foundational skills in mathematics and literacy.

Revise the junior high curriculum to better meet the developmental needs and interests of students.

Fill critical gaps in the junior high and senior high curriculum.

Design a strategy for the effective use of educational technology.

Theme 2: Make high-quality teaching the norm

Establish common and stringent criteria for admission into teacher education (B.Ed.) programs.

Review the content and delivery of the curriculum in teacher education programs.

Improve hiring and induction processes to provide employment opportunities for teachers who are new to the system.

Ensure that all teachers are qualified for their current or planned assignments.

Develop a province-wide strategy for teacher certification and professional development.

Implement a performance management system that promotes teaching excellence.

Consider if supervisory staff should be members of the same union as teachers.

Theme 3: Prepare students for tomorrow's opportunities

Set provincial standards to guide the practice of age-based promotion.

Ensure that policies reinforce the importance of job and life-related competencies.

Ensure junior high and high school student learn the skills and knowledge needed to be well-rounded global citizens and prepared for post-secondary options.

Increase the number of credits required to graduate from 18 to 21.

Create opportunities for students to meet qualified career counselling professionals.

Theme 4: Ensure inclusion works for all

Examine the inclusive education model to ensure flexibility, sustainability, and timely access to assessments, programs, and services.

Assist schools/boards to create a range of learning environments for students with special needs.

Assist schools/boards to create a range of learning environments for students with special needs.

Explore options to bring the broader resources and funding for services of government departments together in support of inclusive education.

Theme 5: Positive climate for learning

Instruct educators/support staff about impact of healthy, positive relationships with students.

Create learning environments where respectful behaviour is expected for students, teachers, and parents.

Train and support school administrators to build cultural proficiency among all staff in schools; to ensure that all families feel welcomed into school environments.

Theme 6: Improve student health and well-being

Achieve national guidelines for daily physical activity.

Promote improved health and fitness through curriculum that identifies healthy, active lifestyles as core competencies in junior high and high school.

Consolidate the resources of multiple agencies to provide comprehensive support for students’ physical, social-emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Ensure teacher and guidance counsellor training respects best practices for promoting healthy social/emotional development of children and youth.

Theme 7: Modernize teaching and learning

Agree on desired children and youth outcomes and reorganize all funding/services through the partial restructuring of provincial departments.

Restructure school boards and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to optimize the quality of programs and services to students.

I. Indigenous and African Nova Scotian Education

CONCERN: African Nova Scotians and Indigenous Nova Scotians have lower rates of high school completion compared to the general population.

CONCERN: Nova Scotia’s public education curriculum is inadequate with respect to African Nova Scotian and Indigenous Nova Scotian histories and cultures.

With such high overall graduation rates, we might also expect that many of Nova Scotia’s marginalized populations are doing reasonably well at the secondary level. Indigenous and African Nova Scotians have historically lagged behind in high school completion. In 2011, for example, 73% of Indigenous Nova Scotians and 77% of African Nova Scotians aged 25-64 had completed high school, compared with 85% in the general population. However, there is reason for optimism in more recent data, which is best exemplified by the shining success of Nova Scotia’s on-reserve Mi’kmaw population at the secondary school level. Currently, 88% of

Mi'kmaw grade 12 students are graduating from high school in the same year, compared to a rate of 35% with other First Nations communities in Canada.

In Nova Scotia, on-reserve schools are run by the Mi'kmaw community through their own education authority, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK, 2016),^[16] which is a unique arrangement created in 1999 through the federal *Mi'kmaw Education Act*. The MK authority employs over 50% Mi'kmaq teachers and uses a curriculum that stresses Mi'kmaq culture, language, history, and ways of knowing. The authority is also focused on continuous improvement and collects an abundance of excellent data on both process and student outcomes. The success of this model provides important lessons for the provincial school system; most notably, that it is possible to achieve phenomenal outcomes through culturally tailored educational programs. Given that Indigenous (and African Nova Scotian) students in the public school system are more likely to report that they do not see their cultures well represented in schools (Province of Nova Scotia, 2014), the MK approach makes a clear case for more culturally-inclusive programming in all schools.

II. Post-Secondary Intentions

CONCERN: Nova Scotia's public schools lack sufficient resources to provide effective educational and career guidance to all students that require it.

Given that the vast majority of young Nova Scotians are completing high school in a timely fashion, it is important to understand how many of these high school graduates pursue PSE. The MPHEC's first-ever high school exit survey completed in Spring 2014 provides excellent insights into the thinking of young Maritimers (a reasonable proxy for young Nova Scotians) at this critical life transition point. Nearly half of all students surveyed (46%) intended to attend university in Fall 2014, an additional 25% planned to attend community college, a private career college, or an apprenticeship program, while 21% indicated that they planned to pursue PSE within the next five years (MPHEC, 2014). In total, 92% of students had strong intentions to seek further education. This suggests that the vast majority of high school graduates feel reasonably well prepared to move on to the next level of education. Even among those who do not plan to attend PSE within five years, just 6% indicated insufficient grades were the reason for their decision. This data also suggests that most young people feel motivated to continue their studies, which contrasts with previous studies that indicated a lack of interest/desire as the main reason not to attend (Foley, 2001; Finnie & Laporte, 2003).

Despite the intentions of most high school graduates to pursue PSE, there continues to be concerns about the quality of information students receive in preparation for this important decision (Minister's Panel on Education, 2014). The Freeman report reaffirms a longstanding belief that public school guidance counsellors are being pulled in too many directions to provide effective career counselling to students in junior and senior high school. Typically,

counsellors have insufficient time to keep up-to-date on essentials like emerging labour market needs, the full range of PSE institution offerings, and the kinds of assistance available to help students pay for PSE. In fact, even if guidance counsellors have all of this information, they still do not have enough time to provide individualized support to every student that needs it.

In response to this issue and many others raised in the Freeman Report, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has since released Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Education, "The 3 Rs: Renew, Refocus, Rebuild" (Province of Nova Scotia, 2015), which set out four broad areas for action (the report refers to them as "pillars") with numerous policy goals listed under each one (see Summary Box 5). While every policy goal in the action plan may have some bearing on PSE access for historically underrepresented groups, the actions under Pillar 4 (Inclusive School Environments) relate to many of the issues raised herein. At this stage, it is impossible to judge whether the planned actions will be successfully implemented to make the intended impacts, but it is at least heartening that government has identified many of the main issues in need of attention to create better student outcomes from our public education system.

III. Child and Family Poverty Impacts Learning

CONCERN: Programs and services targeting children and families are not funded or coordinated sufficiently enough to prepare Nova Scotia's children for success at school and in life.

While what happens within the public school system is surely important, we also know that it takes more than a building, teachers, and a curriculum to help children learn. What happens to children in the early years is critically important. Do they receive high quality and developmentally appropriate childcare? Are parents/guardians able to afford the healthy food necessary to prepare their children for learning? Are there appropriate and timely intervention programs available for children with additional needs prior to school (e.g. early intervention) or during the early school years (e.g. remedial learning, homework support)?

The presence or absence of such resources has a profound impact on an individual's ability to learn. A school system that works well *for the majority* will often continuously fail the student without a healthy breakfast, the student with undiagnosed special needs, and the student who feels unsafe at home. Our school system, therefore, relies on critical supports provided to families by other branches of government – the Departments of Health and Wellness, Community Services, and the newly resituated Early Child Development branch of EECD – and by community groups that work with children and families (e.g. Pathways to Education, YMCA/YWCA, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, municipal recreation programs).

The Freeman Report and EECD’s Action Plan acknowledge many of the same issues – calling for improvements in early childhood education and coordination of programs and services across government’s child-serving departments, for example. Government is already taking action in many of these areas by creating additional Early Years Centres (Province of Nova Scotia, 2016d) and SchoolsPlus programs (EECD, 2016e), reviewing Employment Support and Income Assistance, increasing funding to the Autism Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI) program (Province of Nova Scotia, 2016f; Segal, 2015), etc. Among the many excellent reasons to invest more in Nova Scotia’s youth, whatever their personal challenges, preparing them to succeed at school is of the most importance. It is difficult to say whether these initiatives will result in their desired impacts, but it is encouraging evidence that government intends to think and act more broadly in its approach to education reform.

Summary Box 5: Nova Scotia Action Plan for Education – 4 Pillars of Change and Associated Policy Goals

Pillar 1: Modern Education System							
Restructure EECD	New Centre for Excellence	Address achievement gap	Minister's Forum for Teaching	Business-Education Council	Entrepreneurial Education	Expand preschool services and programs	
Pillar 2: Innovative Curriculum							
Focus on math and literacy	New curriculum Primary-3	Technology-based learning resources	More support for high school math	Career Education Framework for grades 4–12	Early intervention in literacy and math	Communication skills in middle school	New citizenship course in grade 10
Pillar 3: Teaching & Leadership Excellence							
Teaching standards for Nova Scotia	Revamped teacher education	Induction program for new teachers	Teacher recruitment campaign	Teaching specializations in literacy and math	Performance Management System for teachers		
Pillar 4: Inclusive School Environment							
Transition planning guide	Continuum of support for inclusive education	New School Code of Conduct	Treaty Education	African Nova Scotian history	Promote French language and culture	Equity education	Character development

2. Core Post-Secondary Access Programs

Most governments and student groups in Canada have long shared the common goal of broadening PSE access. Though both groups understand that there are many different barriers to PSE access, governments rely heavily on financial aid as the preferred instrument to promote access. In Nova Scotia this means investments in the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program (NSSAP) and the administration of a small number of targeted scholarships.

As for non-financial instruments, the province also funds a number of transition/support programs administered by PSE institutions, targeting specific groups of students facing barriers to PSE access and completion (discussed briefly in Section 3.3).

I. Student Financial Assistance

Taking a step back from Nova Scotia specifically, Canada's approach to SFA has been highly successful in promoting PSE access. Beginning in 1964, the Government of Canada and each of its provinces and territories have incrementally built their programs to help more lower- and middle-income Canadians overcome financial constraints. The Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP) and its provincial counterparts have contributed to enormous growth in post-secondary student enrolment, from around 100,000 total students in the early 1960s to well over 2 million students today (Statistics Canada, 2015, CANSIM Table 477-0019).

“From a student’s perspective, tuition, ancillary fees, and living expenses can be a big stressor, especially for those students who must borrow money and pay it back later.”

a. Canada Student Loan Program/Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program

Coinciding with the growth in student numbers, there has also been enormous growth in the costs of pursuing PSE in Canada, especially since the early 1990s (see StudentsNS, 2013b, c). Given the now immense (and ever-growing) costs of PSE in Canada, there is little doubt that many Canadians could not pursue PSE at all if not for our federal-provincial SFA systems. In 2012/13, for example, over 12,000 Nova Scotians (a full third of Nova Scotian students) relied on government SFA to help pay the costs of attending a Nova Scotian PSE institution (NSSAP, 2013; StudentsNS, 2013a). Furthermore, a large share of SFA recipients were classified as “low-income” – 43% (or 5,300 students) qualified for a \$250 per month-of-study Low-Income Canada Study Grant (CSG) and a further 22% (2,700 students) qualified for the Middle Income CSG (\$100 per study-month). This data makes the importance of SFA programs for PSE access absolutely clear; many of these students simply could not afford university if government SFA was not there for them.

And yet, as described in our 2013 project evaluating Nova Scotia's SFA programs, there are numerous reasons for concern about the programs. For example:

- SFA programs typically do not cover a student's full cost of education;

- Growth in annual assistance levels typically lag behind growth in students' expenses;
- Certain categories of students (e.g. students with children, students with disabilities, part-time students) have historically received far too little assistance to make pursuing PSE a feasible option (though improvements have been made in recent years);
- Many students entering PSE with existing financial or social disadvantages are left with considerable post-graduate debts, creating a potential new burden to be overcome; and
- Other forms of government SFA – pre-study incentives to invest in RESPs and post-study education tax credits – tend to favour individuals from higher income families and with higher post-graduate incomes, respectively.

StudentsNS believes all of these financial issues to be potential barriers and we have previously proposed solutions to each of them. From a student's perspective, tuition, ancillary fees, and living expenses can be a big stressor, especially for those students who must borrow money and pay it back later. From government's perspective, there is constant pressure (from *StudentsNS* and other stakeholders) to 'do something' about the ever-growing costs of PSE. This very often leads government to make marginal improvements in their existing SFA programs. These are changes that are easy to administer and explain, relatively modest in cost, and popular because they put money right into students' hands.

Unfortunately, these factors lead to the perverse outcome that incremental investments in SFA (though important) very often get conflated with being simultaneous investments in improved accessibility. While this can sometimes be the case, as with the introduction of significant new SFA targeting students with disabilities for example, there is scant evidence that investments in areas like debt reduction^[17] have an appreciable impact on PSE participation (either overall or among groups facing barriers).

b. Provincial Scholarships and Grants

In addition to the core federal-provincial SFA programs, the Province also administers a number of targeted merit-based scholarships through the African Canadian Services Division of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD). These scholarships target African Canadian/Nova Scotian students pursuing different avenues of PSE study – university, community college, fine arts, and professional programs – and help to reduce the ever-growing cost burden of attending higher education (see Table 11)(Province of Nova Scotia, 2016g). It is hard to say what direct impact these scholarships have on African Nova Scotian student achievement and/or their decisions to pursue PSE but it is nonetheless important that outstanding students from Black communities receive formal academic recognition through such awards.

c. Post-Secondary Student Support Program

One financial assistance program not covered in previous *StudentsNS* work was the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) that provides financial support to First

Nations students with so-called “Indian status,” as defined by the *Indian Act*. Funding is administered through local First Nations, which may apply local guidelines as long as they are consistent with those set out by the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) (INAC, 2016).[18]

As noted above in Section 2.1. (II), a longstanding freeze in new funding for the PSSSP is often identified as a barrier to Aboriginal PSE participation. Limited funding often means that First Nations must limit the number of individuals they can fund in any given year, which encourages some to forego PSE at least temporarily (INAC, 2015). There is some reason to be optimistic in the immediate future since the newly elected Trudeau government has pledged an additional \$50 million in funding to the PSSSP program. This is in addition to at least \$515 million in core funding for K-12 education and \$500 million over three years for educational infrastructure ([LPC, 2015](#)). It is unsure exactly how much of this funding will be directed toward Nova Scotia’s First Nations, which makes it difficult to project the impact that funds will have on PSE access for Aboriginal students in Nova Scotia. At the very least, any additional funds directed toward the PSSSP should allow more eligible Aboriginal Nova Scotians (Mi’kmaw and Inuit) to pursue higher education sooner.

Table 11. Provincial Scholarships and Awards for African Canadian Students

Name	Amount/Duration/Eligibility
College / Trade School Award	\$1,800 (renewable for 2nd year of 2-year programs for students in satisfactory academic standing) – Applicant must be enrolled full-time in an approved College or Trade School
Performing Arts Award	Amount (\$1,000) – Applicant must be enrolled on a full-time basis in the first or second year of a recognized university degree program, have a concentration in one of the performing arts, have previously demonstrated qualities of performing arts.
Post-Secondary Award	\$2,500 (renewable for 2nd and 3rd years for students in satisfactory academic standing) – Applicant must be enrolled as full time in a recognized undergraduate program; must have demonstrated leadership qualities through participation in community affairs, student activities or athletics.
Science Profession Scholarship	\$7,000 (Amount) – Applicant must be accepted or registered as a full-time student in one of the prescribed university programs (preference given to Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, and Engineering); must demonstrate continued scholastic achievement; must demonstrate past involvement and vision for future development of the African Nova Scotian community.
Teacher Education Scholarship	\$5,000 (Amount) – Applicant must be accepted into a B.Ed. program; demonstrate continued scholastic achievement; must demonstrate past involvement and vision for future development of the African Nova Scotian community.
University Entrance Scholarship	\$4,500 (Amount) – Applicant must have successfully completed Grade 12 in the Nova Scotia school system within the current year, been accepted into and planning to attend university for the academic year immediately following Grade 12. Applicant must have obtained an average of 75% or higher in five Grade 12 academic courses (including English 12); must have demonstrated leadership qualities through participation in community affairs, student activities or athletics; and must be recommended by the high school principal or guidance counselor.

3. Institutional Policies

CONCERN: Some of Nova Scotia’s post-secondary institutions struggle to provide culturally appropriate environments, curriculums, support services, and peer relations required to create a welcoming atmosphere for students from historically marginalized groups.

Each of Nova Scotia’s 10 universities and the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) offer some combination of student financial aid (scholarships and bursaries) and student supports

intended to help students successfully transition into PSE and ultimately to succeed in their studies. With some financial support from the province, each institution takes its own unique approach. Some choose a more generalized system of supports and others offer highly targeted supports to specific subpopulations of students (e.g. Indigenous students, African Canadians, students with disabilities) (see Appendix Table 1 for a full list of programs) (AAWG, 2015).

Across all institutions, there are far too many of these programs to describe in detail, but there are a few programs worthy of at least a brief mention. First is the Transition Year Program (TYP) at Dalhousie University. Funded annually by the Department of Labour and Advanced Education (\$50,000), the TYP is a one-year program for First Nations and African Canadian students who wish to enter university but require extra support in making the transition. The TYP was first established in 1970, making it one of the longest running targeted PSE access programs in the Province.

Another important initiative is Cape Breton University's Unama'ki College, which includes a full academic Department of Indigenous Studies with a commitment to honouring Aboriginal history, culture, language, and knowledge in all of its activities. Unama'ki College has specialized programs in Mi'kmaw Studies, Integrative Science (incorporating Western and Indigenous knowledge), and in Community Studies (for Aboriginal students who cannot maintain typical study schedules due to external commitments). Unama'ki also has an Elder in Residence program, a Mi'kmaw Resource Centre, and numerous other initiatives aimed at making CBU a welcoming environment for Indigenous students.

In contrast to CBU's approach with Unama'ki College, conversations with students and staff at several other institutions highlighted the notable absence of such environments, culturally supportive services, and communities of scholars/peers with common backgrounds. These challenges may be particularly acute at smaller and/or rural institutions at which there are often small numbers of students from any particular demographic community. This alone can make it difficult for students from historically underrepresented populations to feel truly at home in their PSE environment. It can also make it difficult for institutions to offer a full range of supports to any particular group of students. Both of these factors can create a new set of academic and social challenges for such students who may struggle with the distance from their families, their home communities, and their cultural practices.

4. PSE Access Programs Tied to Social Benefits

CONCERN: The benefits available through Nova Scotia's post-secondary financial assistance programs – the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program, Careers Nova Scotia Skills Development, and Educate to Work/Career Seek – offer widely divergent benefits to

students facing similar costs and resource constraints which hinders the facilitation of equal access.

CONCERN: The Department of Community Services authorizes very few Income Assistance recipients to attend university through its Career Seek program.

In addition to the core programs designed to promote access for the more typical student transitioning from high school into PSE, several other government social programs offer access opportunities for program participants interested in upgrading their skills and knowledge.

Programs offering PSE access supports include:

- Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA), the main social assistance program offered through the Department of Community Services (Province of Nova Scotia, 2015b); and
- Careers Nova Scotia (CNS) that administers financial support to persons eligible to receive Employment Insurance benefits (through the Department of Labour and Advanced Education) (Province of Nova Scotia, 2016h).

Tables 12a and 12b summarize the maximum benefits available to students under both programs. These tables exclude a number of supplementary benefits of each program.

Table 12a. ESIA (Career Seek/Educate to Work) Program Benefits Summary

Tuition, Books, Student Fees	Career Seek (university) - no coverage; must apply to SFA program for education costs	Educate to Work (NSCC) - education costs sponsored by DCS (approximately \$6,000 per year)
Shelter Allowance	\$300/month (single)	Up to \$620 (couple with 1+ children)
Personal Allowance	\$255/month (each adult)	\$133/month (each child)
Childcare Allowance	Up to \$400/month (each child)	Also eligible for \$21/day child care subsidy (if necessary)
Other Benefits	e.g. transportation, medical/dental.	As defined in ESIA Policy

Table 12b. CNS Skills Development Program Benefits Summary

Tuition	Annual maximum of \$10,000	Less \$200 confirmation fee; non-DCS clients also pay 5% of tuition
Books	Full coverage	
Student Fees	Full coverage	NSCC College Fee, Health/Dental Insurance, etc.
Basic Living Allowance	Up to \$350/week (family); \$200/week (single)	
Child/Dependent Allowance	Up to \$100 per week	
Away from Home Allowance	\$175/week	If living away from parents/spouse
Transportation	\$150/week maximum	Lump sum for any relocation costs at start/finish.
Disability Benefits	Actual benefits as approved by PSDS	

I. Financial Aid Program Comparisons

To evaluate the PSE access initiatives under each of these programs, the maximum benefits available to those available through the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program (NSSAP), based on the typical costs of university (Table 13) and NSCC programs (Table 14) in Nova Scotia, are compared.[19] In the analysis we include all of the various child benefits and other

program subsidies (e.g. childcare) that a typical low-income family would be eligible to receive from the federal and provincial governments.

Table 13 ESIA Career Seek versus Student Financial Assistance Maximum Benefits Comparison (Low Income Students) (based on 2014/2015 data) (adapted from StudentsNS, 2013a and 2015a)						
8 MONTH UNIVERSITY COSTS						
	SINGLE		SINGLE W/ CHILD		COUPLE	
TUITION	5,157		5,157		5,157	
OTHER FEES	808		808		808	
BOOKS & SUPPLIES	2,157		2,157		2,157	
HOUSING	4,020		8,040		4,020	
FOOD	2,416		3,160		4,200	
CHILD CARE	0		7,040		0	
INCIDENTALS	1,334		2,668		2,668	
TOTAL	15,892		29,030		19,010	
STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE MODELS				ESIA - CAREER SEEK + SFA MODELS		
	SINGLE	SINGLE W/ CHILD	COUPLE	SINGLE	SINGLE W/ CHILD	COUPLE
SHELTER ALLOWANCE	N/A	N/A	N/A	2,400	4,560	4,560
PERSONAL ALLOWANCE	N/A	N/A	N/A	2,040	3,104	4,080
CHILD CARE	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	3,200	0
TOTAL				4,440	10,864	8,640
INCIDENTALS				1,067	2,134	2,134
8 MONTHS MAXIMUM SFA				8 MONTHS SFA FOR EDUCATION COSTS		
FED LOAN	7,140	7,140	7,140	6,634	7,140	7,138
FED CSG-LL	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
FED CSG-DEP	0	1,600	0	0	1,600	0
PROV LOAN	3,672	3,672	3,672	0	920	0
PROV GRANT	2,448	2,448	2,448	0	614	0
PROV-DEP GRANT	0	680	0	0	680	0
TOTAL	15,269	17,540	15,260	8,634	12,954	9,138

OTHER CASH BENEFITS (MONTHLY MAXIMUMS)						
NS CHILD BENEFIT	0	52	0	0	52	0
CCTB/NCBS	0	307	0	0	307	0
GST/HST	22	56	45	22	56	45
UCCB	0	100	0	0	100	0
CC SUBSIDY	0	462	0	0	462	0
TOTAL	22	1,038	45	22	1,038	45
TOTAL (8 MONTHS)	179	8,302	357	179	8,302	357
STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE MODELS			ESIA-CAREER SEEK + SFA MODELS			
TOTAL RESOURCES	15,439	25,842	15,617	14,320	34,254	20,270
TOTAL COSTS	15,892	29,030	19,010	15,892	29,030	19,010
RESOURCES LESS COSTS	-453	-3,188	-3,393	-1,572	5,224	1,260
SFA VS. ESIA (CAREER SEEK) FINAL TOTALS						
	SINGLE	SINGLE W/ CHILD	COUPLE			
SFA	-453	-3,188	-3,393			
ESIA (CAREER SEEK)	-1,572	5,224	1,260			
*Note that blue indicates surplus funds and yellow indicates a resource deficit						

Table 14. ESIA-Educate to Work v. Careers NS v. Student Financial Aid Maximum Benefits (Low Income Students) (based on 2014/15 data) (adapted from StudentsNS, 2013a and 2015a).

NSCC PROGRAM AND LIVING COSTS (9 MONTHS)											
	SINGLE			SINGLE W/ CHILD			COUPLE				
TUITION	3,040			3,040			3,040				
OTHER FEES	600			600			600				
BOOKS & SUPPLIES	2,157			2,157			2,157				
HOUSING	4,523			9,045			4,523				
FOOD	2,718			3,555			4,725				
CHILD CARE	0			7,920			0				
INCIDENTALS	1,500			3,000			3,000				
TOTAL	14,538			29,317			18,045				
CAREER NS (SKILLS DEVELOPMENT)				ESIA - EDUCATE TO WORK				STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE			
	SINGLE	SINGLE W/ CHILD	COUPLE		SINGLE	SINGLE W/ CHILD	COUPLE		SINGLE	SINGLE W/ CHILD	COUPLE
LIVING ALLOWANCE	7,800	7,800	13,650	SHELTER ALLOWANCE	2,700	5,130	5,130	FED LOAN	8,190	8,190	8,190
AWAY FROM HOME	6,825	6,825	0	PERSONAL ALLOWANCE	2,295	3,492	4,590	FED CSG-LL	2,250	2,250	2,250
CHILD CARE	0	3,900	0	CHILD CARE	0	3,600	0	FED CSG-DEP	0	1,800	0
CNS TOTAL COSTS	14,625	18,525	13,650	TOTAL ESIA	4,995	12,222	9,720	PROV LOAN	4,212	4,212	4,212
TUITION & FEES WAIVER	3,253	3,253	3,253	TUITION, FEES, BOOKS, WAIVER	5,797	5,797	5,797	PROV GRANT	2,808	2,808	2,808
SFA (LOAN)	2,000	2,000	2,000	INCIDENTALS	1,200	2,400	2,400	PROV-DEP	0	780	0
TOTAL	19,878	29,628	18,903	TOTAL	11,992	20,419	17,917	TOTAL	17,460	20,040	17,460

OTHER CASH BENEFITS (MONTHLY)											
NSCB	0	52	0		0	52	0		0	52	0
CCTB/NCBS	0	307	0		0	307	0		0	307	0
GST/HST	22	56	45		22	56	45		22	56	45
UCCB	0	100	0		0	100	0		0	100	0
CC SUBSIDY	0	462	0		0	462	0		0	462	0
TOTAL	22	1,038	45		22	1,038	45		22	1,038	45
TOTAL (9 MONTHS)	201	9,340	402		201	9,340	402		201	9,340	402
CAREER NS (SKILLS DEVELOPMENT)											
ESIA - EDUCATE TO WORK											
STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE											
TOTAL RESOURCES	20,079	38,968	19,305		12,193	29,759	18,319		17,661	29,380	17,862
TOTAL COSTS	14,538	29,317	18,045		14,538	29,317	18,045		14,538	29,317	18,045
RESOURCES LESS COSTS	5,542	9,651	1,261		-2,345	442	275		3,124	63	-183
ENS VS. SFA VS. ESIA											
	SINGLE			SINGLE W/ CHILD			COUPLE				
CNS	5,542			9,651			1,261				
SFA	3,124			63			-183				
ESIA	-2,345			442			275				
*Note that blue indicates surplus funds and yellow indicates a resource deficit											

Based on the analysis, a number of broad conclusions can be drawn upon:

- A low-income university student (i.e. a single, recent high school graduate, with no dependents or other atypical costs) generally receives the best total package of benefits from the regular SFA system (see Table 13);
- For couples and for most parents with children (single and couples), the maximum benefits available through ESIA would leave them better off than the benefits they would receive through the SFA system alone would (see Table 13). The gap between ESIA and SFA widens further if we include summer in the analysis because ESIA benefits continue and SFA benefits typically do not (except for year round students) (data not shown);
- For community college students, CNS benefits are more generous than either of the above, across all model family types (see Table 14);

- Despite the comparative advantages of CNS over the other programs, a majority of student/family types still have very narrow or negative financial margins (see Table 14). When summer costs and benefits are included, almost all student/family types have negative margins (data not shown).

Given that each of these programs has the same basic goal in mind – to provide education and career training to help financially vulnerable Nova Scotians achieve financial independence – it is difficult to justify widely divergent benefits available through different government programs.

With respect to ESIA recipients, in particular, another issue of some concern is the potential for career counsellors within the program to direct clients toward shorter, cheaper programs under the Educate to Work stream when the client is both eligible and interested in pursuing a four-year university degree program. According to various sources, changes to the employment supports component of Nova Scotia's social assistance program around the year 2000 led to a marked decrease in Career Seek approvals for university programs and a large increase in Educate to Work approvals for community college programs. On this issue, it obviously makes sense to have a comprehensive screening program to determine the best educational fit for any ESIA recipient. At the same time, however, any policy arbitrarily restricting access to university programs on the basis of program budget – as opposed to the client's academic abilities and career goals – would only serve to introduce new inequities for the client to overcome, rather than breaking down barriers as intended.



Toward a Truly Equitable PSE System in Nova Scotia

In this paper, the most current research literature on PSE access in Canada has been examined and the best available data on the PSE participation of historically disadvantaged Nova Scotians has been reviewed. Not surprisingly, many of the barriers identified in the literature are relevant in the local context. For example:

- Attending university or college in Nova Scotia is somewhat less likely if you are an Indigenous person, an African Nova Scotian, a Nova Scotian affected by disability, a person from a lower income family, or a person whose parents lack formal education;
- If you grew up in a rural community, you are less likely to pursue PSE; but if you do, you are more likely to go to NSCC than a university;
- If you are over 25 years of age and pursuing PSE for the first time, you are more likely to attend NSCC, rather than university.

To promote greater PSE access, governments and institutions tend to focus most of their outreach activities toward students nearing the secondary-to-PSE transition (e.g. students in grade 12). When it comes to helping students who have already decided to pursue PSE, government assistance to students comes primarily in the form of financial help (e.g. student loans and grants, a small number of scholarships, need-based grants/bursaries). PSE institutions also provide various forms of financial aid to students (e.g. scholarships, bursaries, research/teaching assistantships) in addition to a wide variety of student transition and student support programs (some of which are at least partially funded by government).

“...the vast majority of young Nova Scotians aim to study at the post-secondary level.”

Based on the evidence presented throughout this paper, it is fair to say that many Nova Scotians have gained access to PSE in part due to the guidance and support available through existing programs. It must be noted that there are some outstanding success stories, including CBU's Un'amaki College, Dalhousie's Transition Year program, NSCC as a critical entry point for higher education, and a much-improved Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program.

We must, however, also draw on some of the much less flattering conclusions to provide accuracy in this report. Nova Scotia's policies for promoting PSE access have been too narrowly focused on financial issues, even though financial barriers to PSE access are less influential than others. Most notably, recall that a parent with a PSE credential is the strongest predictor of a young person's future PSE participation - this is crucial reminder that *context matters*.

If a young person grows up in an environment where education is valued, in which learning is encouraged and rewarded, they may be more likely to see school as an exciting and enriching opportunity. Remembering that post-secondary educated parents are more likely to foster this kind of home environment than parents with a high school education or less, it must be acknowledged that this is a key source of privilege for some Nova Scotians. However, what if your parents are not receive a post-secondary education? Most parents understand that education opens doors in the modern economy and therefore encourage their children accordingly; high school completion rates approaching 90% would suggest that most Nova Scotian parents ‘get it’ and even if they do not, their children clearly do.

Of course, high expectations and encouragement are not always enough. For the student that struggles to learn, having post-secondary educated parents with the skills and knowledge to help, plus the social capital to seek out and find extra help, is another key advantage. Additionally, post-secondary educated parents do tend to earn a higher income, which may confer their children with more childhood enrichment opportunities (e.g. music, sports, summer camps) and most certainly provides advantages if a child requires specialized assistance with a learning disability, a mental health condition, or a difficult subject area. These are real, tangible advantages to having post-secondary educated parents.

To be clear, our purpose here is not to pass judgment on less educated parents or families but rather to draw attention to the need for community support that can help *less privileged* children to overcome the barriers in front of them and reach their goals. On the subject of goals, the MPHEC’s Grade 12 Graduate Survey (2015) definitively confirmed that the vast majority of young Nova Scotians aim to study at the post-secondary level. StudentsNS believes it is in our collective interest as Nova Scotians to help each and every one of them to reach that goal. The question that remains is: *How can we do it?*

1. Learning About Learning – The Case for Better Data

This first rule of policymaking is that in order to produce the best quality policy, always start with strong, credible evidence. As an organization concerned primarily with PSE, we are very fortunate that so much excellent research has been done on PSE access across Canada and other jurisdictions. At the very least, we knew where to start looking for access barriers in Nova Scotia’s PSE system. Unfortunately, when researching the available data describing our local PSE population you quickly face very real barriers to understanding. When it comes to PSE access data, there are numerous problems that must be addressed if we hope to create truly impactful access policies.

1. **First and foremost, data on Nova Scotia’s PSE population must be comparable across institutions and across time. Every institution – all 10 universities and the**

NSCC – must collect the same package of demographic data, every year, using similar methodologies.

- 2. To maximize usefulness, the datasets collected must be *complete*. This entails collecting data on as many subgroups of the PSE population as possible – ideally all of those discussed in this paper – and possibly others.**
- 3. To limit data collection costs (and further enhance its usefulness), the dataset should be designed to be compatible with existing datasets collected by individual institutions, the MPHEC, the Province, and/or Statistics Canada (e.g. the Post-Secondary Student Information System, Labour Force Surveys, Youth Surveys, Census data, Canadian University Survey Consortium data).**

There is much to be gained by making these changes happen. The Province can get a better grasp on system-wide gaps (i.e. which groups face the largest or most intractable barriers), which existing policies are working already, and which new policies are likely to have the biggest impact on PSE access going forward. Nova Scotia's PSE institutions would gain access to a significant new source of valuable information to help with local student recruitment and retention. Ultimately the data would put many future students on the path to improved PSE opportunities.

While we absolutely must strive for the most comprehensive dataset possible, we must also acknowledge that there will be challenges and limitations to navigate. For example, legal constraints and mistrust of public institutions by some historically marginalized groups will likely make it necessary to allow each student the option to self-select exactly what personal information will be provided. Before we even begin attempting to collect more information about marginalized students, it is absolutely critical that we collaborate with appropriate representatives and stakeholders from each of the specific communities about the data to be collected. The onus would be on the Province and the PSE institutions to demonstrate the value of the proposed new data to be collected; as well as to demonstrate that the work would be conducted with total honesty, utmost respect, and true collaboration. If government and PSE institutions establish the proper landscape for this important work, StudentsNS believes that most everyone involved will see the advantages of participating (see Enidlee Consultants, 2009 and Restoule et al. 2014 for suggested approaches to engaging African Nova Scotians and Indigenous peoples respectively).

2. A More Inclusive and Supportive Public Education System

With armloads of comprehensive studies just behind us – including the BLAC Report “Reality Check” (2009), the Minister’s Panel on Education (2014), Nova Scotia’s Action Plan for Education (2015), and the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) – we already have many worthwhile policy ideas that, if implemented, would improve outcomes for students in Nova Scotia’s public education system. With all of these works in mind, here we

have chosen to highlight a few key ideas that would likely have the largest overall impact on improving PSE access for historically underrepresented populations Nova Scotia.

4. **With the goal of preparing every Nova Scotian child to succeed at school – and consistent with the Freeman Report and the Action Plan for Education – the Province should commit to integrating child and youth-related programs and services across government to ensure every child and family receives all appropriate resources and learning supports available to them.**
5. **Building on (4.), the Province should commit to establishing a “whole child/whole family” system of supports that would ensure every Nova Scotian family has the resources to provide children with adequate nutrition, safe and affordable housing, appropriate health care and dental care, and the other necessities children and youth require to be prepared for learning.**
6. **Building on (5.), the Province should commit to establishing a “cradle to career” approach to child and youth development by continuing to invest in Early Childhood Education, Early Intervention programs for children with developmental disabilities, and inclusive parental education programs.**
7. **The Province, via the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, should take all necessary steps to promote welcoming, inclusive, and safe school environments for all students and their families. At a minimum, this would include updating all curriculum to reflect the full multicultural diversity of Nova Scotia’s population and to reflect Nova Scotia’s true history in relation to the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic minority populations that exist here (e.g. Indigenous, African Heritage, and francophone Nova Scotians, recent immigrants, etc.).**
8. **The Province, via the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, should implement curriculum and student counselling service changes that will help to raise students’ awareness of post-secondary education considerations long before entering Grade 12. Formal education and post-secondary/career counselling should begin no later than the Grade 9 year.**
9. **Building on (8.), each of Nova Scotia’s post-secondary institutions should identify opportunities to collaborate with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Regional School Boards, and individual schools to help raise students’ awareness of post-secondary options in Nova Scotia.**

Each of recommendations above (4 through 9) would help to ensure that every student graduating from a Nova Scotia high school has been thoroughly prepared, consulted, and counseled about the full range of PSE options available, about the academic and financial requirements for pursuing those options, and about the career prospects related to each of the PSE options under consideration. Students in Nova Scotia should have easy access to information needed to help them navigate their paths through public education system and into the PSE system. This is especially true for Nova Scotians facing additional barriers to PSE

participation because they will benefit most from understanding the practical applications of their schoolwork at an earlier age.

3. Financial Aid That *Really* Breaks Down Barriers

As described above, governments, PSE institutions, and even students themselves are often preoccupied with the financial barriers to PSE access. Despite the fact that financial concerns are sometimes overblown, we have identified a number of areas where more financial assistance could make a real and significant impact on accessibility as well.

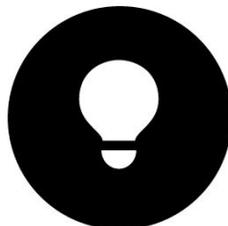
10. Nova Scotia has created three separate routes for lower income Nova Scotians to obtain financial assistance for post-secondary studies – through Employment Nova Scotia, the Employment Support and Income Assistance program, and the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program. Since each of these programs has the same basic goal – to assist the program recipient toward employment and financial independence – the three programs should be aligned to offer similar benefits (i.e. resources available to study) regardless of where a prospective student seeks financial help.
11. In addition to standardizing benefits across the three programs, the Province should modify benefits policies to address existing shortcomings in the benefits available. For example:
 - o Families with children (especially single parent families) should receive more support to meet the costs of childcare;
 - o In the summer months (i.e. when the student is not attending classes), families with limited earning potential should be provided with additional financial support to maintain their basic standard of living;
 - o All benefits should be indexed to annual growth in costs (i.e. actual educational costs + inflation=adjusted living costs).
12. The Province should explore the feasibility of providing top-up grants to Indigenous Nova Scotian students who face budget shortfalls due to insufficient Post-Secondary Student Support Program funding (i.e. Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw with Status, Nova Scotia Inuit).
13. Building on (12.), the Province should explore the feasibility of providing full PSE study grants to Indigenous Nova Scotians that do not qualify for the federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program.
14. The Province should explore the feasibility of providing full PSE study grants to Indigenous African Nova Scotians (i.e. multi-generation residents of Nova Scotia).
15. To promote earlier consideration of PSE options and leverage federal grant funding, the Province should explore the feasibility of assisting low-income parents to invest in Registered Education Savings Plans for eligible children.

Several of the above recommendations (10 through 12) would help to fill existing funding shortfalls that currently cause many students to struggle financially during their studies (and likely influence some Nova Scotians not to pursue PSE at all). The remaining recommendations (13 through 15) would open up new sources of funding for specific groups facing significant barriers to PSE attendance. While all of the above recommendations are justifiable policy initiatives, StudentsNS proposes several of these as feasibility studies because we recognize that the expected impacts and costs are difficult to assess without additional data (that is currently unavailable to us).

4. Promoting Diversity at Post-Secondary Institutions

All of the recommendations above are geared toward ensuring that Nova Scotians from marginalized populations have opportunities to pursue PSE. We must also work to ensure that Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions can be welcoming, inclusive environments for students from diverse backgrounds to live, learn, and interact with others. As we have learned throughout this research project, some Nova Scotia PSE institutions have more to do than others. Smaller and more rural campuses tend to have fewer resources to provide culture-specific programs and services to students from different backgrounds. At the same time, the relatively small student populations at such campuses also ensures that the number of students from any particular historically underrepresented group is likely to be quite small. The same logic applies to the even smaller population of faculty and staff. All of the above make it a considerable challenge for PSE institutions to become more inclusive and more attractive destinations for students from diverse backgrounds.

- 16. Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions must take steps to ensure that students from historically marginalized communities feel welcome and supported to succeed in their studies.**
- 17. Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions must develop specially targeted recruitment strategies for historically marginalized groups and, in the process, must also uphold the highest standards of honesty about the suitability of programs, services, and institutional environment for students from specific backgrounds.**



Conclusion: From Post-Secondary Access to Lifelong Success

At the outset of this project, we aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the PSE access barriers most relevant here in Nova Scotia. For the most part, these barriers are consistent with those observed elsewhere. We propose a total of 17 new recommendations that StudentsNS believes would be helpful tools to break down PSE access barriers for several historically disadvantaged subpopulations.

In closing, it is important to acknowledge the reality that helping more Nova Scotians to overcome the *initial barriers in the pursuit* of PSE is only one step in the right direction. This is an important achievement for the individuals involved, and it is one that public policy has an important role in promoting. Social mobility, however, requires more than just *making it* to college or university. To reap the full individual and societal rewards, we must also ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds *successfully complete* their chosen post-secondary programs; and further still, that they are equipped with the right combination of knowledge, professional competencies, and essential life skills to *translate educational achievement into lifelong success*. Only then can we begin to remove multi-generational barriers to social mobility and, in turn, transform disadvantaged families and communities from within.

Policy Resolution

WHEREAS StudentsNS holds the following foundational PRINCIPLES:

Every qualified Nova Scotia resident who wishes to pursue post-secondary education should be able to do so, irrespective of their financial situation, socioeconomic or ethnic background, physical, psychological or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or any other factor other than qualification.

The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student, restrict their ability to pursue the career path they choose, or make them financially unable to live in the community that they choose.

WHEREAS StudentsNS has identified the following CONCERNS:

The lack of data on the post-secondary participation of different demographic groups hinders effective policy analysis on the accessibility and affordability of post-secondary education for Nova Scotians.

Data describing university and community college student populations are not comparable to one another, which complicates comparisons and system-wide analyses.

Indigenous Nova Scotians under 40 are underrepresented in Nova Scotia's universities.

The Post-secondary Student Support Program is chronically underfunded, causing many First Nations youth to forego or delay entry into post-secondary education.

Post-secondary institutions recruitment strategies often fail to address the questions/concerns of Indigenous youth and their communities.

African Nova Scotians continue to face significant barriers to academic success and post-secondary access.

Nova Scotians from rural communities are less likely to attend university than people from urban areas.

Nova Scotians affected by disabilities continue to be underrepresented in our post-secondary student population.

Low levels of post-secondary participation by young Nova Scotian males lags far behind the participation of their female peers.

Females are hugely underrepresented in certain programs and disciplines in academia, many of which coincide with higher earning fields of employment such as science, engineering, public administration, and business.

African Nova Scotians and Indigenous Nova Scotians have lower rates of high school completion compared to the general population.

Nova Scotia's public education curriculum is inadequate with respect to African Nova Scotian and Indigenous Nova Scotian histories and cultures.

Nova Scotia's public schools lack sufficient resources to provide effective educational and career guidance to all students who require it.

Programs and services targeting children and families must be well funded and better coordinated to prepare Nova Scotia's children for success at school and in life.

Some of Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions struggle to provide culturally appropriate environments, support services, and peer relations required to create a welcoming atmosphere for students from historically marginalized groups.

The benefits available through Nova Scotia's post-secondary financial assistance programs – the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program, Careers Nova Scotia Skills Development, and Educate to Work/Career Seek – offer widely divergent benefits to students facing similar costs and resource constraints which hinders the facilitation of equal access.

The Department of Community Services authorizes very few Income Assistance recipients to attend university through its Career Seek program.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT StudentsNS makes the following RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. First and foremost, data on Nova Scotia's post-secondary population must be comparable across institutions and across time. Every institution – all 10 universities and the NSCC – must collect the same package of demographic data, every year, using similar methodologies.
2. To be maximally useful, the datasets collected must be *complete*. This entails collecting data on as many subgroups of the post-secondary student population as possible – ideally all of those discussed in this paper – and possibly others.

3. To limit collection costs (and further enhance its usefulness), the dataset should be designed to be compatible with existing datasets collected by individual institutions, the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, the Province, and/or Statistics Canada (e.g. the Post-Secondary Student Information System, Labour Force Surveys, Youth Surveys, Census data, Canadian University Survey Consortium data).
4. With the goal of preparing every Nova Scotian child to succeed at school – and consistent with the *Freeman Report* and the *Action Plan for Education* – the Province should commit to integrating child and youth-related programs and services from across government to ensure every child and his/her family receives all appropriate resources and learning supports available to them.
5. Building on (4.), the Province should commit to establishing a “whole child/whole family” system of supports that would ensure every Nova Scotian family has the resources to provide children with adequate nutrition, safe and affordable housing, appropriate health care and dental care, and the other necessities children and youth require to be prepared for learning.
6. Building on (5.), the Province should commit to establishing a “cradle to career” approach to child and youth development by continuing to invest in Early Childhood Education and Care, Early Intervention programs for children with developmental disabilities, and inclusive parental education programs.
7. The Province, via the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, should take all necessary steps to promote welcoming, inclusive, and safe school environments for all students and their families. At a minimum, this would include updating all curriculum to reflect the full multicultural diversity of Nova Scotia’s population, to reflect Nova Scotia’s true history in relation to the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic minority populations that exist here (e.g. Indigenous, African Heritage, and francophone Nova Scotians, recent immigrants, etc.).
8. The Province, via the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, should implement curriculum and student counselling service changes that will help to raise students’ awareness of post-secondary education considerations before entering Grade 12. Formal education and post-secondary/career counselling should begin no later than the Grade 9 year.
9. Building on (8.), each of Nova Scotia’s post-secondary institutions should identify strategic opportunities to collaborate with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Regional School Boards, and individual schools to help raise students’ awareness of post-secondary options in Nova Scotia.
10. Nova Scotia has created three separate routes for lower income Nova Scotians to obtain financial assistance for post-secondary studies – through Careers Nova Scotia, the Employment Support and Income Assistance program, and the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program. Since each of these programs has the same basic goal – to assist the program recipient toward employment and financial independence – the three programs should be aligned to offer similar benefits (i.e. resources available to study) regardless of where a prospective student seeks financial help.

11. In addition to standardizing benefits across the three programs, the Province should modify benefits policies to address existing shortcomings in the benefits available. For example:
 - o Families with children (especially single parent families) should receive more support to meet the costs of childcare.
 - o In the summer months (i.e. when the student is not attending classes), families with limited earning potential should be provided with additional financial support to maintain their basic standard of living.
 - o All benefits should be indexed to annual growth in costs (i.e. actual educational costs + inflation-adjusted living costs).
12. The Province should explore the feasibility of providing top-up grants to Indigenous Nova Scotian students who face budget shortfalls due to insufficient Post-Secondary Student Support Program funding (i.e. Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw with Status, Nova Scotia Inuit).
13. Building on (12.), the Province should explore the feasibility of providing full post-secondary study grants to Indigenous Nova Scotians that do not qualify for the federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program.
14. The Province should explore the feasibility of providing full post-secondary study grants to Indigenous African Nova Scotians (i.e. multi-generation residents of Nova Scotia)
15. To promote earlier consideration of post-secondary education options and leverage federal grant funding, the Province should explore the feasibility of assisting low-income parents to invest in Registered Education Savings Plans for eligible children.
16. Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions must take steps to ensure that students from historically marginalized communities feel welcome and supported to succeed in their studies.
17. Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions must develop specially targeted recruitment strategies for historically marginalized groups and, in the process, must also uphold the highest standards of honesty about the suitability of programs, services, and institutional environment for students from specific backgrounds.

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Appendix

Appendix Table 1 can be found on our website at: <http://studentsns.ca/research/reports/>.

[1] Further to this, children with access to these opportunities may also achieve at a higher academic level, thereby making them more likely to earn merit-based entrance scholarships to PSE institutions. Similarly, even lower achieving children of affluent parents may sometimes be favoured for admission on the basis of parental social capital (i.e. alumni status, business connections, etc.). It would be both naïve and counterproductive to ignore these realities, as they can and do speak to the privilege enjoyed by higher SES Nova Scotians.

[2] The Nova Scotia government's recent decision to allow a university "tuition reset" will make the financial challenges even greater in future years as tuition fees will begin to grow more quickly beginning in 2016/17. As of 2014/15, over 2,800 SFA recipients were left with so-called "unmet need" – their total costs exceeded their available financial resources even after receiving the maximum available assistance.

[3] StudentsNS has been openly supportive of the Nova Scotia's Student Assistance Program (NSSAP); especially the many improvements made in the past several years (see StudentsNS, 2013 and Section 3.2 below). It is a critically important program but it is not above thoughtful critique.

[4] The National Household Survey was introduced to replace the mandatory long form census cancelled by the Conservative federal government in power at that time. It has been widely criticized (and since confirmed) as statistically inferior due its being voluntary.

[5] Unless otherwise noted, NSCC data used in this study comes from the Institutional Research office at NSCC. We are fully confident in the accuracy of the data but also limited by what is available to us.

[6] It bears mentioning that this statistical category represents an extremely diverse group of people, including students from many of Canada's largest immigrant communities, i.e. African, Caribbean, East Asian, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Southeast Asian. While it is unquestionably positive that so many Canadian immigrants and children of immigrants go on to study at the PSE level, it is obvious that grouping all such student together in a single statistical category almost certainly obscures the struggles faced by some groups (e.g. immigrants from conflict zones, refugee claimants). It is important that we understand the PSE participation characteristics of each subgroup in addition to the group as a whole.

[7] The Mi'kmaq nation's traditional territory covers all three Maritime Provinces (N.S., New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island), the eastern Gaspé Peninsula region of Quebec, and the Island of Newfoundland. The total population of Atlantic Mi'kmaq is 62,500 with 63% living off-reserve and 37% on-reserve. For the purposes of this study, we are concerned explicitly with Mi'kmaq living within the modern territory of Nova Scotia.

[8] Organizations targeted by these recommendations are the Department of Education (now EECD) and Regional School Boards, the African Canadian Services Division (ACSD), the Council on African Canadian Education (CACE), the Africentric Learning Institute (ALI), and the Black Educators' Association (BEA).

[9] Our 2015 paper, "[Fees, Funding, and Student Voice at the Nova Scotia Community College.](#)" found that the NSCC has prioritized access and affordability and delivered important outcomes, attracting more students from communities that are traditionally underrepresented in post-secondary education (mature learners in particular). NSCC has relatively low cost programs due to shorter program length and lower tuition fees, but graduates' debt levels remain higher than the national average, are leading to elevated default rates, and have been neglected by the Province as compared with university students' debt.

[10] Our 2013 paper, [“From Worst to First: How Nova Scotia Can Lead the Pack on Student Financial Assistance.”](#) critically reviewed the complex array of federal and provincial SFA policies and programs. Our key findings indicate that:

- (i) access to Nova Scotia’s PSE system has changed little since the early 1990s; (ii) a lack of reliable systemic data makes it difficult to draw clear linkages between SFA policy and access to education; (iii) recent changes to SFA programs have already helped to reduce the cost and debt burdens on many students; and (iv) finally, government investments in pre-study savings programs and post-study tax credits heavily favour higher income Canadians/Nova Scotians at the expense of promoting accessibility and affordability for individuals with the greatest financial need.

Based on these findings, we proposed a package of incremental proposals beginning with a reallocation of poorly targeted provincial government funds to improve PSE accessibility and affordability for needy students and underrepresented groups; extending additional funding to students when they are studying; and greatly reducing the burden of student debt for all provincial student loan borrowers.

[11] Our 2014 paper, [“Disable the Label: Improving Post-Secondary Policy, Practice and Academic Culture for Students with Disabilities.”](#) discusses the systemic barriers that persons with disabilities face when pursuing PSE. Providing an in-depth discussion of the supports and challenges found within the academic system, this paper begins to re-conceptualize how disability is viewed and accommodated. Nova Scotia has made great strides toward enabling persons with disabilities to access post-secondary education in the past several decades, but there is more to do. Persons with disabilities remain among the most underrepresented and underemployed groups in Canada. Programs aimed at closing these gaps are often insufficient. Similarly, the supports offered by PSE institutions could be improved to better support students with disabilities. We make recommendations that would further enhance PSE access for persons with disabilities, promote their academic success, and lead to post-graduate career success.

[12] STEM = Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

[13] The NSCC’s School of Trades and Technology offers programs in Aerospace, Engineering and Applied Science, Transportation, Manufacturing, Energy, Heritage, Oceans, the Built Environment, and Natural Resources and Environment

[14] The NSCC’s School of Applied Arts and New Media offers programs in Applied Arts (multimedia production), Geomatics, and Information Technology.

[15] While Nova Scotia’s high school completion rates are undoubtedly a positive sign, the Freeman Report and other education scholars have identified concerns that this metric alone may not accurately reflect true academic achievement in Nova Scotia’s school system. This stems, at least in part, from the relatively recent “social promotion” policies that allow children to advance through grade levels without meeting the expected academic benchmarks.

[16] Millbrook First Nation is the only Mi’kmaq Band not included under the MK education authority.

[17] Examples of debt reduction programs include the Canada Study Grants and the Nova Scotia Loan Forgiveness Program (formerly the Nova Scotia Student Debt Cap Program).

[18] Pursuant to the Indian Affairs and Northern Development Act (1985), the official name is the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). Under the Federal Identity Program, the Liberal government elected in 2015 changed the applied name of this department from the previous Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). In recent memory, this department has also been known by the applied name of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (also abbreviated to INAC).

[19] The Educational Bursary Program for Youth In Care is excluded from this part of the analysis because the program is, arguably, not comparable to all of the others. It is important to recognize that government has a special responsibility to Youth in Care because, in these cases, the state has assumed full responsibility as a parent to the youth. In the absence of parents, such youth have no viable alternative financial support mechanism and it falls upon government to fill that role (Province of Nova Scotia, 2013).